

nara roesler

alexandre arrechea



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## **alexandre arrechea**

b. 1970, Trinidad, Cuba

lives and works in New York, USA

Between 1991 and 2003, Alexandre Arrechea was part of a collective of Cuban artists named Los Carpinteros, along with Marco Castillo and Dagoberto Rodríguez Sánchez. The group was best known for its play on dichotomies—the artists would depart from the idea of reproducing a common, everyday object, with perfect craftsmanship but would structure it differently, oddly and imperfectly, inevitably forcing a reformulation, or re-reading of a traditional object. After leaving the group, Arrechea began to address current political issues more directly, giving his sensibility and attention to contemporary culture the center stage.

Arrechea's work is also remarkable in its interdisciplinary and inclusive nature, often creating pieces such as large installation works in museums or commissions for public spaces that invite the viewer to participate and physically engage with the works. The artist also encourages more traditional contemplation through his sculptures or graphite and watercolour works on paper. Either way, his production is always intricately tied to the space or context it occupies, and systematically demonstrates a preoccupation for the socio-political environment in which the work is to be inserted. Arrechea's work positions itself between what is individual and collective, between the public and the private. In investigating this space, the artist addresses social norms and group behaviors, engaging with socio-economics, races and urbanism as a means of understanding both personal identities and mass experiences.

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### **selected solo exhibitions**

- *Alexandre Arrechea: Intersected horizons*, Museum of Latin American Art (MOLAA), Los Angeles, USA (2023)
- *Alexandre Arrechea: Landscape and Hierarchies*, ArtYard, Frenchtown, USA (2022)
- *Corners*, Nara Roesler, New York, USA (2019)
- *Higienopolis*, Casado Santapau Gallery, Madrid, Spain (2018)
- *Uninhabited Order*, Fredric Snitzer Gallery, Miami, USA (2018)
- *La seducción del fragmento*, Palacio de Molina, Cartagena, Spain (2017)
- *Jerarquias Negadas*, Galeria Habana, Habana, Cuba (2016)

### **selected group exhibitions**

- *El pasado mio: Afrodescendant contributions to cuban art*, Cooper Gallery, Cambridge, USA (2022)
- *Obsesiones y acumulaciones: el gabinete del artista*, Estudio Figueroa-Vives and the Norwegian Embassy in Cuba, Habana, Cuba (2019)
- *The World's Game: Fútbol and Contemporary Art*, Pérez Art Museum Miami (PAMM), Miami, USA (2018)
- *Construções sensíveis*, Centro Cultural Banco do Brasil (CCBB-RJ), Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (2018)
- *Adiós Utopia: Dreams and Deceptions in Cuban Art since 1950*, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, USA (2017)
- *Without masks: Contemporary Afro-Cuban Art*, Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes de La Habana, Habana, Cuba (2017)

### **selected collections**

- Daros Collection, Zurich, Switzerland
- Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA), Los Angeles, USA
- Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York, USA
- Museo del Barrio, Nova York, USA
- Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía (MNCARS), Madrid, Spain

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<b>4</b>	interventions and public projects
<b>20</b>	installations and sculptures
<b>27</b>	videos
<b>30</b>	masks
<b>39</b>	watercolors

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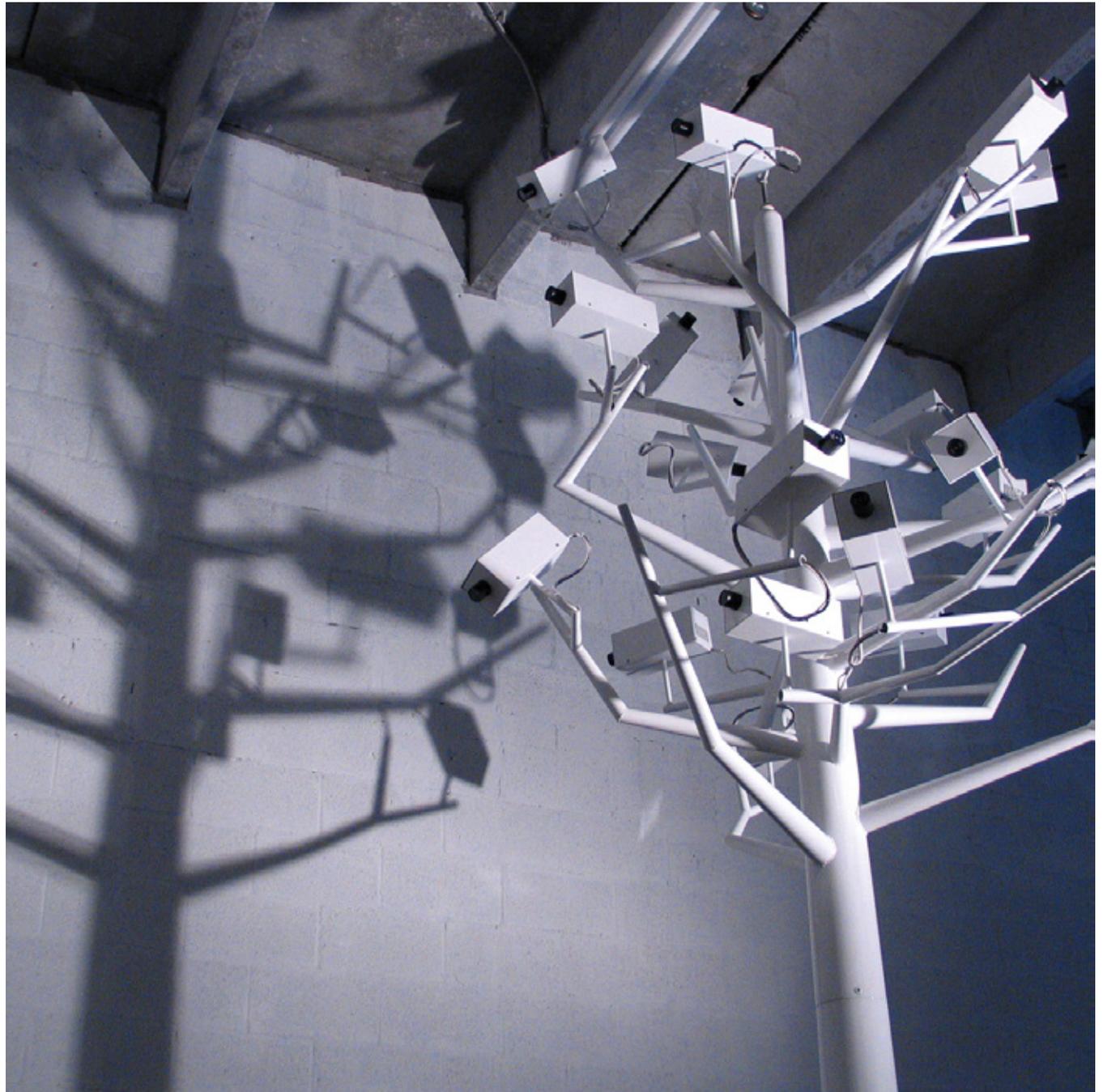
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## interventions and public projects

While he was a part of Los Carpinteros, Alexandre Arrechea created works that merged sculpture, design, and architecture, creating dysfunctional hybrid objects that tensioned the limits between daily life and imagination, by taking away their original function and transforming them into something nonsensical and uncanny. When Arrechea started his solo career, in 2003, he turned his attention to the relationship between public and private spaces, creating works based on Joseph Beuys' 'social sculpture' principle. Many of these earlier solo productions explore spaces under surveillance.

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*The Garden of Mistrust*, 2005  
[detail]  
aluminum, surveillance cameras,  
computer equipment  
150 x 150 x 400 cm





*The Garden of Mistrust* (2003-05) is an iconic work that inaugurates a new phase in Arrechea's artistic trajectory. The steel sculpture covered in white paint has the shape of a tree in which, at the end of each branch, we see a surveillance camera. The cameras become disembodied observers of museum visitors, while their images and actions have been recorded, uploaded, and made visible on the internet. For curator and art historian Claudia Calirman, 'The piece also subverts the idea of who sees and what is supposed to be seen in an institutional space, such as museums and galleries. In *The Garden of Mistrust*, it is not only the viewer who watches the work of art, but also the installation that enters the viewers' space, violating their privacy.'

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*The Garden of Mistrust*, 2005  
[detail]  
aluminum, surveillance cameras,  
computer equipment  
150 x 150 x 400 cm

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*Sweat* (2004), also engaged with the idea of surveillance, but on a small and more affectionate scale. Arrechea registered his neighbors and friends playing on a public basketball court. Afterward, he invited those friends and community members to a small party in the same place where they used to meet and exercise. The artist projected the images on the structures of the court, mixing different times and ways of interacting in the same space, creating a situation in which the participants are actors as well as spectators.



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*Sweat*, 2014  
installation  
12'14"





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*The Orange Tree* emerges as the sum of themes present in *The Garden of Mistrust* (2003-05) and *Sweat* (2004). Also modeled as a tree, the sculpture seems at first as a democratic and participative piece, since the branches have in their ends basketball goals, and balls appear as a species of fruits. But if one takes the sculpture as a game and tries to apply it to an actual game it will be necessary to create your own rules or to embrace chaos, accepting that the traditional way of playing the game has been violated, turning it into an impossible game.

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*Orange Tree*, 2010  
enamelled aluminium, balls, baskets  
7 m | 23 ft (height)

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*Mississippi Bucket* (2008), is, in turn, is a public sculpture created for an outdoor plaza nearby the Mississippi River retaining wall in New Orleans. The shape is modeled after the Mississippi Gulf, and it actually worked as a functioning bucket: when it rains, the interior fills up with water, which either spills over or settles at and then slowly evaporates. Arrechea plays with the relations between technology and nature, as with the geographic aspects related to the city in which it was installed. It is important to remember that New Orleans, one of the places most affected by the Katrina Hurricane in 2005, is below sea level and has historical flood problems.



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*Mississippi Bucket*, 2008  
salvaged wood from  
Hurricane Katrina  
approx. 10 m | 32.8 ft





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When Coachella's artistic director, Paul Clemente, invited Arrechea to conceive a work for the festival, he suggested that the Cuban artist could materialize the structures presented in *A few days before Katrina* (2008), a watercolor depicting two chairs facing each other supporting a horizontal building. Facing constructive problems to sustain the sculpture, Arrechea reformulated the project so that the building would be supported by only one chair. The artist then replicated the result in four other chairs, each one with their respective buildings. *Katrina Chairs* (2016), at a distance, looks like a giant piece of furniture, but as one gets closer, they notice the architectural scale. Arrechea reflects on the disaster of Katrina Hurricane, which affected tens of thousands of people in the United States. During the day, the chairs would be used as shelter from the sun, while in the night they presented the public with bright colored lights that changed the original color of the structure.

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*Katrina Chairs*, 2016  
wood, steel and concrete  
4 pieces of 20 m | 65.6 ft  
(height of each chair)  
installation view at 2016 Coachella  
Valley Music and Arts Festival

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*Katrina Chairs*, 2016  
installation view at 2016 Coachella  
Valley Music and Arts Festival



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*No Limits* (2013) was a site-specific installation presented on Park Avenue, New York. Each one of the ten pieces made by Arrechea are based on iconic buildings from the city. The artist brings together the shape of the Empire State, the Chrysler Building, the US Courthouse, among others, and playful elements as twists, turns, and rotations, creating an elastic architecture that introduces the dynamics of motion to this usual static element and leads us to think about the challenges of adapting to new realities. The series is based on early experiments of the artist in the *After the Monument* (2010) series, which feature rolled-up stainless steel skyscrapers.



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*Empire State (NOLIMITS Series),*  
2013  
stainless steel  
449,6 x 294,6 x 28,6 cm  
177 x 116 x 11,2 in



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*Helmsley (NOLIMITS Series)*, 2013  
stainless steel  
449,6 x 441,3 x 80 cm  
177 x 173.7 x 31.5 in



*Chrysler (NOLIMITS Series)*, 2013  
stainless steel  
452.1 x 194 x 27.3 cm  
178 x 76.4 x 10.7 in



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*Elastic Metropolitan*  
*(After the Monument Series)*, 2010  
aluminum  
221 x 91.4 x 30.5 cm  
97 x 36 x 12 in

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Referencing a meat thermometer, Arrechea conceived *Meet and Music* (2018), which is structured as a concentric piano's keys, simulating an object in operative mode. Taking advantage of this aspect, the work reflects on the dynamics and impact of music in communities and how it can determine our social behavior. The piece was created specifically for Kansas City, famous for both meat and jazz.



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*Meet and Music*, 2018  
steel, aluminum, high density  
polyurethane and glass  
152,5 x 330,2 cm  
60 x 130 in





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## installations and sculptures

*Dust* (2005-06) is an installation by Alexandre Arrechea in which several punching bags made of blown glass are organized in the gallery space. The fragility of the material makes their conventional use improper. Instead, we are invited to look through the glass and see what is inside it. In each one there remains the debris of cities, which name is engraved on the glass. The magnitude of the urban landscape is reduced to dust, as the resistance of the punching bag is transformed into something fragile.

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*Punching bags / Dust (Havana), 2005*  
*Punching bags / Dust (New York), 2005*  
*Punching bags / Dust (Los Angeles), 2005*  
blown glass, crushed debris, and text  
101,6 x 35,5 cm | 40 x 14 in [each]

Collection Martin Margulies





An arena is a recurrent form used by Arrechea in his investigations around the relations between power, surveillance, and the collective dimension of society. These pieces draw from historic precedent: the Roman coliseum, the place where death amused the public, distracting people from the political and administrative problems. *Perpetual Free Entrance* (2006), as the art critic and curator Claudia Calirman explains 'consists of an architectural sculpture of a section of a sports stadium made out of wood. In the entrances to this built-in stadium are three plasma TVs showing images of the public as they enter the museum. This work establishes a parallel between the stadium and the museum.' Moreover, the precision of execution conveys the piece with a sense of rigid control, which leads to thinking that the spectacle in the stadium is a pretext for surveillance.

*Perpetual Free Entrance*, 2006  
wood, 3 plasma tvs, video  
& audio installation  
1100 x 400 x 250 cm  
433 x 157.5 x 98.4 in

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One can see these works as reminiscences of Arrechea's period in Los Carpinteros, since the works developed by the group are presented as dysfunctional constructions and wooden hybrids. *Arena* (2007) has firstly been developed through drawings and then built as a stadium model, in which the seven entrances are replaced by monitors that display visitors entering the museum. The work is arguably a reflection on the relation of art and spectacle, public surveillance, and the relation between viewer and object.

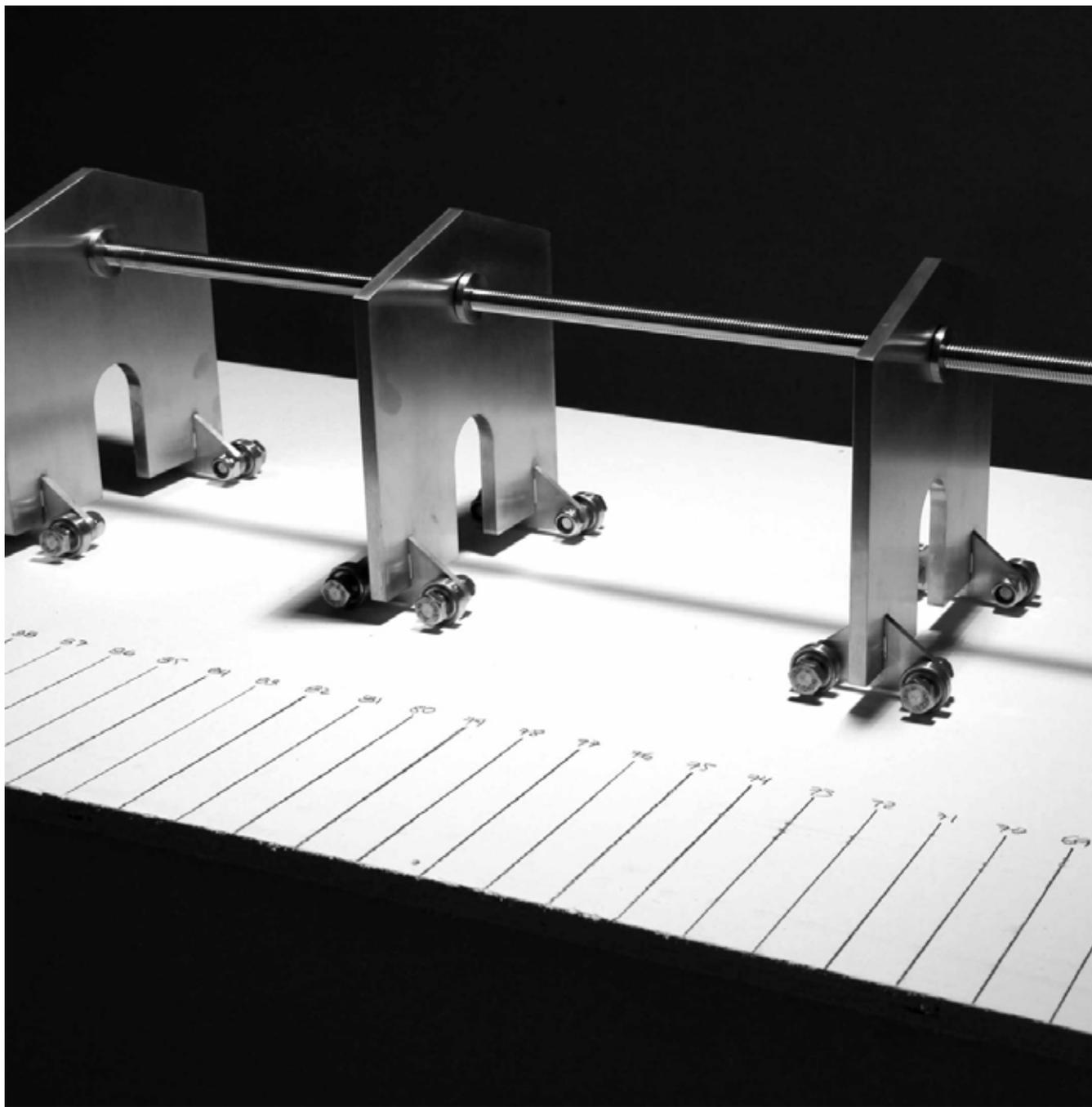
The installation *The Room of All* (2009), presented in the 10<sup>th</sup> Havana Biennial, is a work which dimensions vary according to the rise and fall in the Dow Jones indexes. The distance between the maquettes of steel houses that integrate the work is reduced or broadened according to the variation. The reduced spaces between them are reflections of the negative fluctuations and make one think about the vulnerability of every inhabitant of the planet in its subjection to the economic system.

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*Arena I*, 2007  
foam-fibergrass, wood  
ø 114 cm | ø 44.9 in

Alan Klugger and Amy Dean Collection





*The Room of All*, 2009  
stainless steel  
20 x 300 x 30 cm  
7.9 x 118 x 11.8 in



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*The Room of All*, 2009  
watercolor on paper  
114 x 150 cm | 44.9 x 59.1 in



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A more playful note appears in *Pregón* (2009), a sculpture made of a piano, on which Arrechea has installed hundreds of tiny, empty chairs, all facing the missing pianist. Facing the absence, both of the virtuous musician and the audience, we are invited to perceive the relationships presented in the space of the work and in the space around, as well as to question the relationship between artist and audience, an element brought by the work by the difference in scale between them.

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*Pregón*, 2009  
concert piano, wood, felt

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*The Fact* (2014), is an installation that intends to reproduce a portion of landscape (plow field) made out of painted wood. The resemblance with a piece of furniture connects landscape and design, art and agriculture. Over the structure, there are various elements that sit on it, mostly photography embedments that depict drops of water and other liquids, a way found by Arrechea to address fertility and the multiple ways to approach this idea.



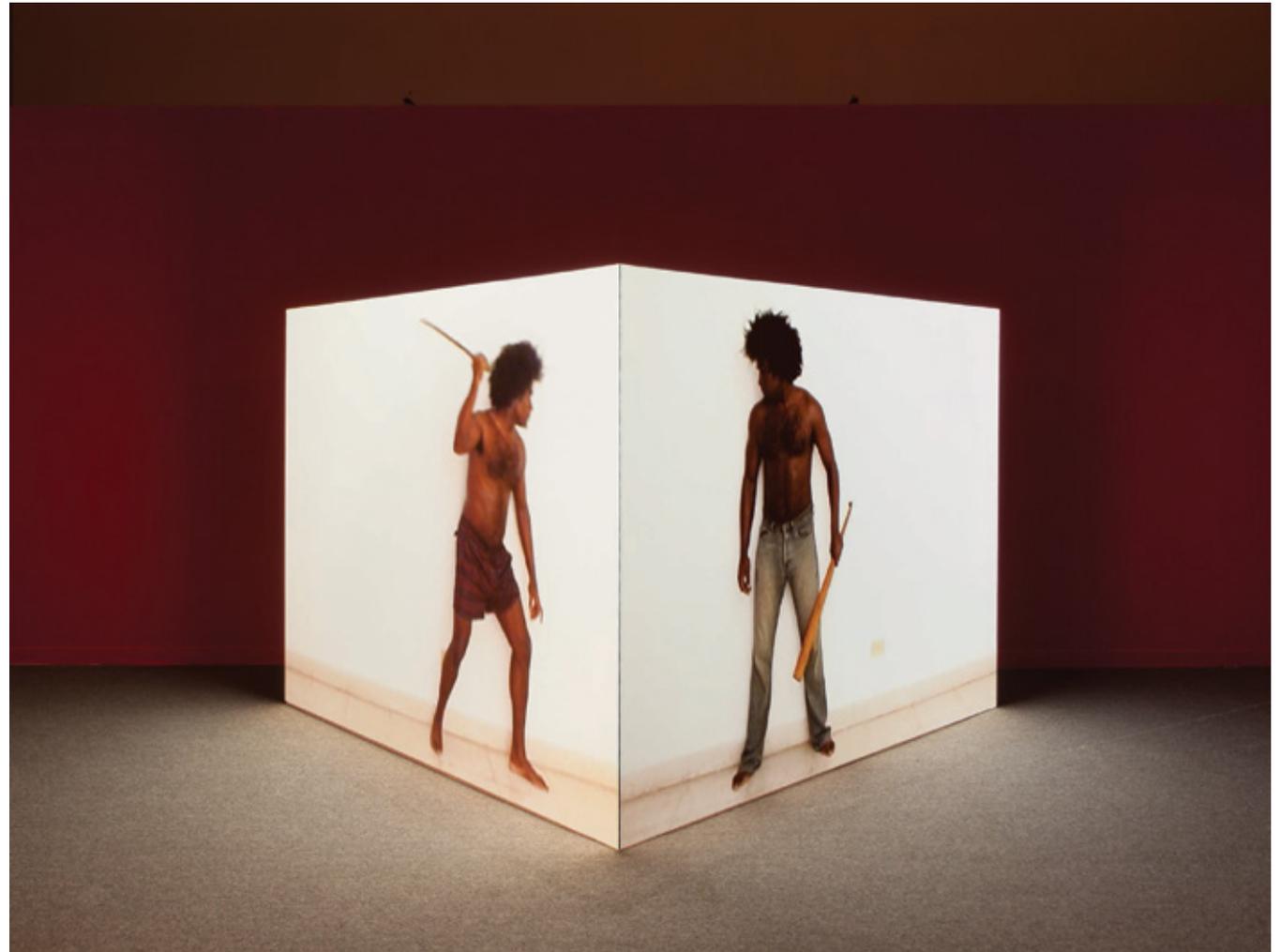
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*The Fact*, 2014  
installation, wood, embedments  
228 x 900 x 400 cm  
89.8 x 354.3 x 157.5 in

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## videos

In the video installation *White Corner* (2006), Alexandre Arrechea uses a characteristic architectural element, the corner, to produce a dramatic effect. The work consists of two projections, each one on a wall arranged in a way that, if someone is facing one of the projections, they cannot see the other one. On both screens, one can see the artist himself. The artist holds, on one hand, a bat, on the other, a machete. The scene itself is not violent but charged with tension, as if at any moment one side could attack the other, in choreographed movements of moving forward and retracting.



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*White Corner*, 2006  
video installation (two channel  
video), wall brick corner  
190 x 220 cm | 74.8 x 86.6 in



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*Lament for Ben* (2004), made in collaboration with Tony Labat, also stems from a dual principle, but here the screen is divided in two. In jazz rhythm Arrechea and Labat, facing each other, execute a succession of push-ups that tests the resistance of both individuals in a game of opposites: white versus black; teacher versus disciple. In the way that the images are displayed, the physical exercise is transformed into a game, a playful flirtation, causing a metamorphosis of roles through the sequence, in which the adversaries, sometimes far from each other, then really close, begin to complement one another.

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*Lament for Ben* (collaboration with Tony Labat), 2013  
video  
04'51''

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Exhibited for the first time in the NASDAQ billboard, in Broadway, New York, *Black Sun*, (2009), is a short video animation of a wrecking ball arcing through space and bouncing off an invisible surface. In Arrechea's words: 'The piece, as I see it, is the failure of the destructive power of the wrecking ball. After having watched the video for a while, you have the sensation that you are "insistently knocking the door" and that is the part that interests me. It is a piece that is requesting a space rather than wrecking another.'



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*Black Sun*, 2009  
video presentation  
Time Square NYC, 2010  
NASDAQ Billboard Corner  
of 43rd Street and Broadway,  
New York, USA

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## masks

In recent years Alexandre Arrechea has been working with one of the most traditional forms of manifestation of artistry and faith, identity and the symbolic. In the *Painting and Conflict* (2019) series, Arrechea creates colored areas in mask-shaped canvases. The density of the acrylic paint lets hints on the direction of the brushstroke, as the integration between different colors that inhabit the same area, brings a gestural aspect to the rational geometrical composition.

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*Painting and conflict, 1, 2019*  
acrylic on canvas  
180 x 122 x 5,5 cm  
70.9 x 48 x 2.2 in





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*Painting and Conflict, 2*, 2019  
acrylic on canvas  
62 x 45 x 4,5 cm  
24.4 x 17.7 x 1.8 in

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*Painting and Conflict, 9, 2019*  
acrylic on canvas  
62 x 45 x 4,5 cm  
24.4 x 17.7 x 1.8 in





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In other works, the artist creates masks using collage procedures, in which he digitally creates compositions by cutting-out photographs of Cuban street corners. Arrechea says that in these works 'two buildings that might be considered emblematically antagonistic are forced into an unnatural coexistence.' With these fragments, the Cuban artist creates eyes, mouths, noses. The city became a mask as if the landscape had its face. The titles of Arrechea's works indicate localities, as in *Black Eye in Vedado* (2019); his personal mood, such as in *Black Smile* (2019); or commentaries, such as *Confusion in Centro Havana* (2018).

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*Black Smile*, 2019  
uv cured acrylic paint on handmade  
paper (linen, hemp and cotton)  
94 x 63,5 cm | 37 x 25 in



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*Black Eye in Vedado*, 2019  
uv cured acrylic paint on handmade  
paper (linen, hemp and cotton)  
96,5 x 66 cm | 38 x 26 in



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*New Theatre*, 2019  
uv cured acrylic paint on handmade  
paper (linen, hemp and cotton)  
96,5 x 66 cm | 38 x 26 in



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*Two Cops Wandering Around*, 2019  
uv cured acrylic paint on handmade  
paper (linen, hemp and cotton)  
96,5 x 66 cm | 38 x 26 in

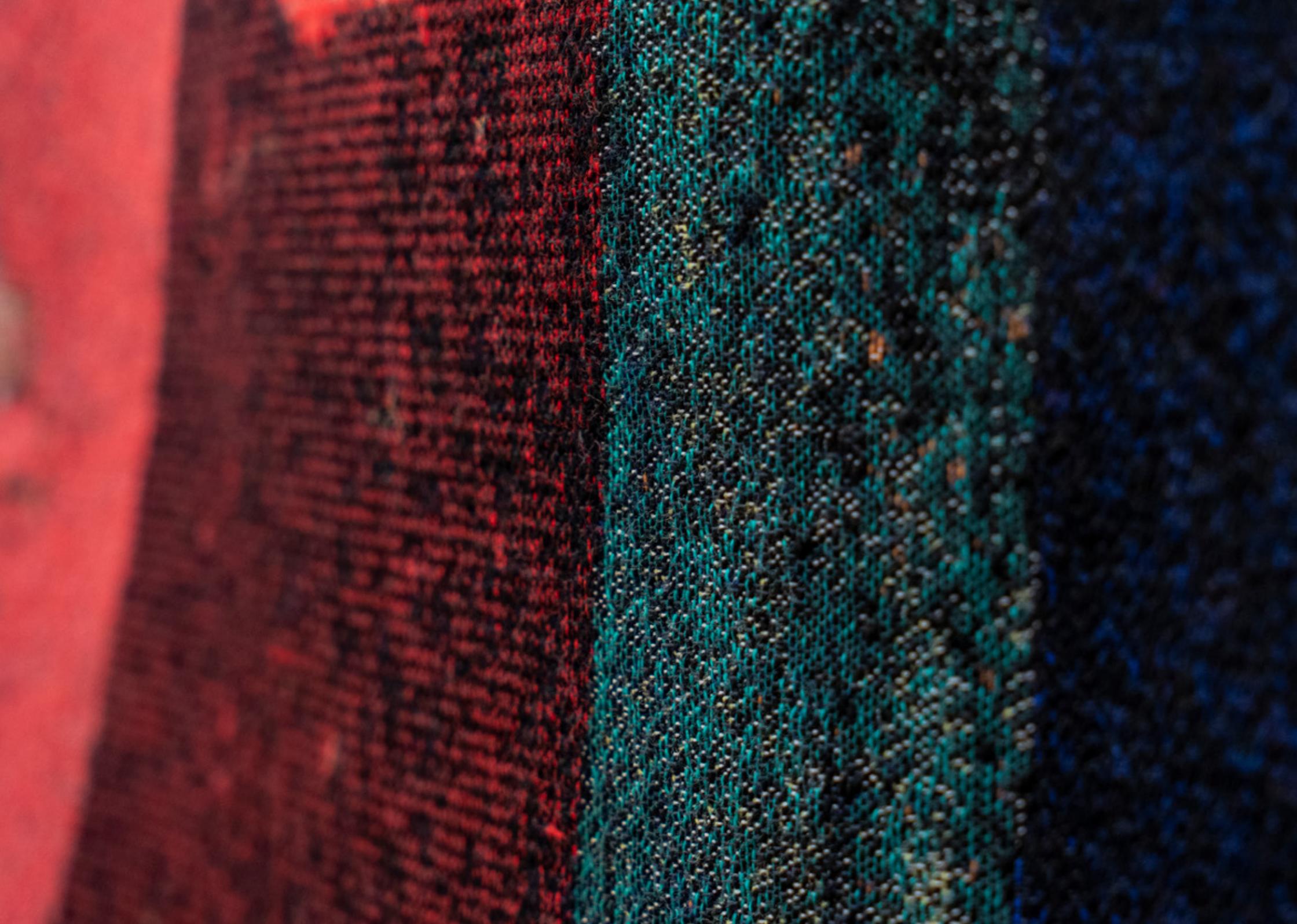
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As Rodolpho de Athayde, curator of Arrechea's exhibition at Nara Roesler in 2019, said, 'There are two examples in art history that come to mind when we think of a mask, both linked to the artistic avant-garde of the early twentieth century: Pablo Picasso, whose relationship with appropriating masks, especially those associated with African cultures, is well-known; and the other is Kazimir Malevich, with his famous *Head of Peasant* (1929), the result of the application of Suprematist concepts to the figuratism of his later works. Arrechea is absolutely aware of these analogies and uses them as one regurgitates ideas of the past masters, making the masks out of different substances, such as the constructive surfaces and corners of a city, and giving them new meaning.'



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*Eight Different Problems*, 2019  
tapestry  
182 x 177 cm | 71.7 x 69.7 in





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First exhibited in the 13<sup>th</sup> Havana Biennial, *The Face of the Nation* (2019) is a black and white movie, with an original soundtrack by Pavel Urkiza, in which an almost frantic sequence of abstract images creates a mask in which the geometrical traces are constantly changing. The forms and composition make us think of African masks, leading us to reflect on ancestral heritage.

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*The Face of the Nation*, 2019  
video projection  
5'15'

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In the *Architectural Elements* (2004–05) series, we find photos of performances where the artist carries heavy construction elements such as bricks, concrete or wood, and transforms them into an ephemeral sculpture sustained by the strength of his arms, playing with the tension between the object and his body as a support. These elements, in a raw state, are those later used to make buildings, houses, and monuments. Hiding his face, they work as masks, leading us to think not only about their relationship with the artist body but about the efforts of thousands of anonymous people who work in construction.



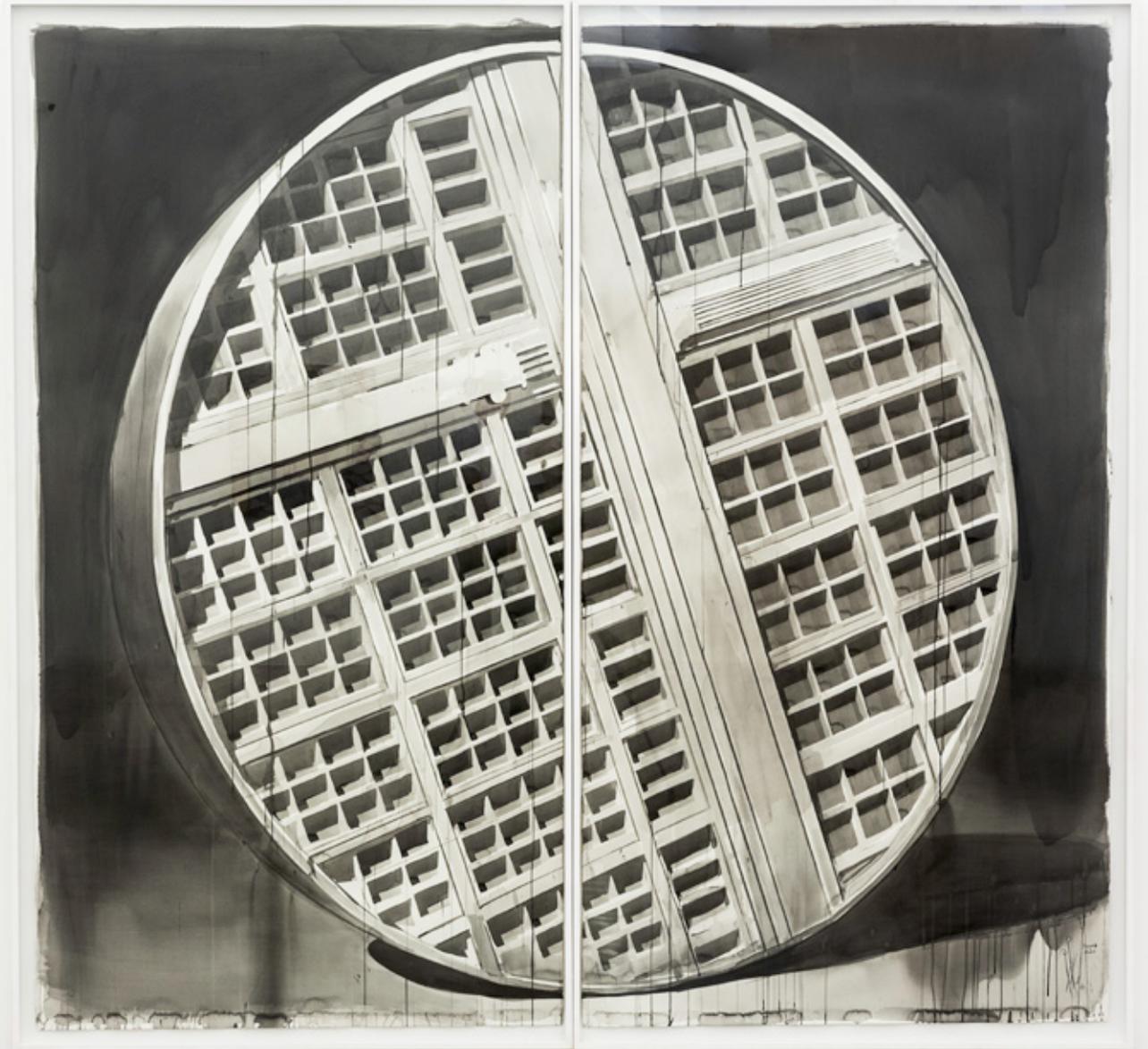
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*Architectonic Elements*, 2014  
digital print  
109 x 76 cm | 42.9 x 29.9 in

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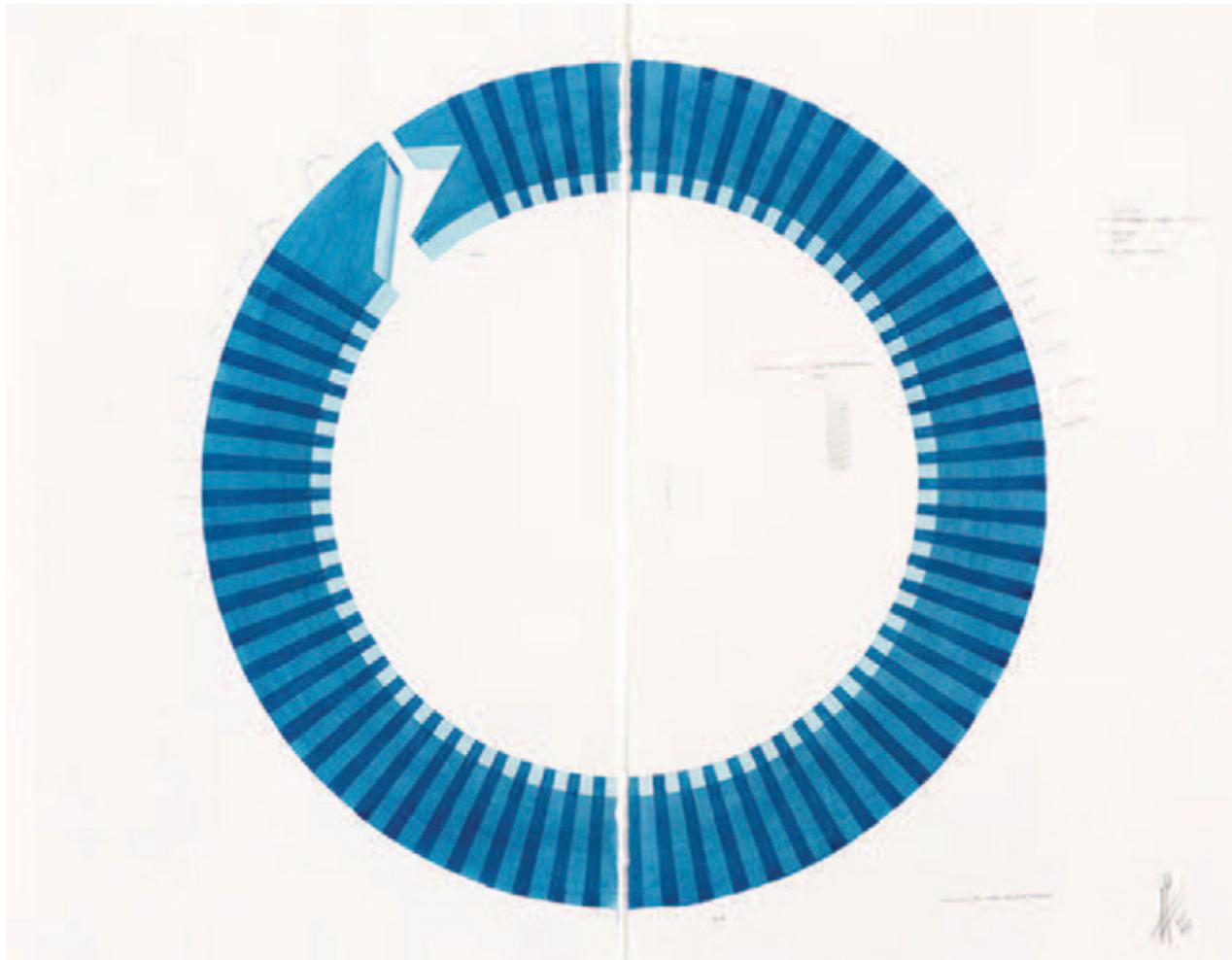
## watercolors

In his watercolors, Alexandre Arrechea freely explores his own imagetic universe by creating powerful compositions, which often include architectural elements. These watercolors have an opposite rationale to a traditional architectural project, which ultimate goal is to plan for something that should be built. Instead, the artist creates fantastic propositions and visual puns, using great and detailed techniques that make us want to believe that they could be real. Arrechea has drawn forms from historical buildings and architectural structures overcoming them through visual lightness and malleability, which leads us to reflect on the politics of urbanization and life in the city.



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*Fragment*, 2015  
watercolor on paper  
two parts of  
228 x 114 cm | 89.8 x 44.9 in (each)



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*City Corp*, 2011  
watercolor on paper  
100 x 140 cm | 39.4 x 55.1 in

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